

THE McHENRY HOUSE

Little Rock, Ark.

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Arkansas

Historic American Buildings Survey
H. Ray Burks, District Officer
702 Wallace Bldg.
Little Rock, Arkansas.

THE McHENRY HOUSE (Residence)

Highway 70, 10 Mi. West Little Rock, Pulaski County,
Arkansas.

OWNER: Mr. J. L. Murphy.

DATE OF ERECTION: 1836.

ARCHITECT: Gideon Shyrock.

PRESENT CONDITION: Since the delineation of these drawings, the McHenry House has been purchased by Mr. J. L. Murphy. At present he is restoring and repairing this structure as nearly according to the original house as history indicates.

NUMBER OF STORIES AT PRESENT: One and one-half.

MATERIALS OF CONSTRUCTION: Brick wall on rock footings, whole oak logs for sills and joists, 12" or more in diameter, placed 2'-0" o. c., floored with 2" thick by random width cypress boards.

Exterior walls are solid brick. Interior walls are wood stud. All walls are smooth plastered with a wavy finish.

Staircase is solid walnut.

Roof is hand split cypress shingles.

The original front porch is missing, the present porch having twice the floor area. There is no trace of the original front porch detail.

The Milk house and Kitchen extensions correspond in construction.

Information assimilated by Guy W. Swaim, District Officer, from Mr. J. L. Murphy, present owner, and Miss Bernie Babcock, Supervisor of the Federal Historic Records Survey of Arkansas.

ADDITIONAL DATA: This house was designed by Gideon Shyrook, architect for the old Arkansas State Capitol. It was constructed by Thomas Thorne who started the construction of the old State Capitol.

The original owner was the son of Archibald McHenry, one of the earliest settlers of Pulaski County. Sold to Samuel C. Neel in 1881. In October 1882 was sold to Nannie Neel. Was in the Neel family until August 1936 when sold to J. L. Murphy, present owner.

This is believed to be the first brick residence built in the State of Arkansas. Was used for a Stage Coach stop during Civil War.

David O. Dodd, Confederate spy was captured several hundred yards from the house by Federals and held prisoner there until removed to Little Rock by stage coach.

(OVER)

Rev. The. T. Waterman. Nov. 27-36

BEGIN RESTORING HISTORIC McHENRY PLACE NEAR HERE

The house in which David O. Dodd, one of Arkansas's Civil war heroes, was held for a night by Union soldiers after he was captured as a spy has been bought by J. L. Murphy, regional custodian of corporations for the Resettlement Administration, and is being restored to its original design in every possible detail.

Built in 1836 by a son of Archibald McHenry, one of the early settlers of Pulaski county, it is still known as "the McHenry place," and is situated about 10 miles out on the Hot Springs highway, a Military road when the house was built.

Samuel C. Neel bought the house in 1881, and sold it a few months later. In October, 1882, Nannie Neel purchased it and it has been in possession of the Neel family ever since, until last June, when Miss Ethel Neel, a teacher in the David O. Dodd school, sold it to the Murphys.

The American Historical Society had blueprints made of the house several years ago, as one of America's most important buildings, historically.

Possibly the first brick house ever built in Arkansas—out of bricks made on the place and lumber shipped by boat from Cincinnati or Louisville and hewn by hand—very little repair work has been needed to keep the place in perfect condition. The walls, floors, chimneys, mantels, doors, window facings and even some of the window panes of the original house are in practically as good condition as they were when the house was built.

The brick walls are 12 inches thick and the joists under the bottom floor boards are whole oak logs, each some 12 inches in diameter and placed about two feet apart. The floor boards themselves are two inches thick and six inches wide. All of the wood used in the house is either cypress, walnut or oak.

Bricks used in the repair work are from the ruins of the old Merchants hotel, recently destroyed by fire, which was built by a brother-in-law of the original owner of the McHenry house. The brother-in-law was Jacob Reider, who owned the entire block in which the hotel was situated. He was the father of Mrs. Robert Newton and Mrs. Thomas Newton.

One of the many interesting features of the house is the front entrance, a paneled double door, flanked by inserted shutters as tall as the doorway. This type of entrance, with its huge lock and the brass key that fits it, is a much-prized feature of colonial architecture, but is almost extinct today. The lock on these doors is intact, and Mrs.

Murphy is the proud owner of the original key, fully six inches long.

The doors open into a spacious hall, at the far end of which there is a wide solid walnut staircase, also paneled. The handrail is said to be one of the few perfectly round ones in existence, and is identical with the one in the house at Bardstown, Ky., in which the song "My Old Kentucky Home" was composed.

The kitchen is separate from the rest of the house, as was the custom with houses built before the Civil war, and there is a deep brick fireplace in each end of it, where the cooking was done when the cooks were Negro slaves. A deep cellar under the kitchen served as a place of refuge for occupants of the house during the War Between the States.

An old "milk house" is still standing also, and it too is in excellent condition. Troughs along the sides of the brick floor were kept filled with water piped from a deep well close beside the house and the milk buckets were set in them. This was the only way early occupants of the house had of keeping the milk cool. A smoke house, also built at the time the house was built, is still intact, too.

The house was designed and the building of it supervised by Thomas Thorn of Allenton, N. J., also the architect for the old state capitol. His sister married a son of Archibald McHenry. The installation of modern conveniences, such as plumbing, closet space and electric lights, has been planned so cleverly by Milton King, the architect who is personally supervising the work, in collaboration with Mr. and Mrs. Murphy, that they detract little from the colonial atmosphere of the place.

Besides "the McHenry house," it has been also called "the stagecoach house" because travelers from Little Rock changed horses there, the "Ten-mile house" because of its distance from Little Rock, and "the David O. Dodd house."

The Murphys plan to move in about the second week of October, when work on the house will be completed.

Archibald McHenry was the father of the first white child born in Little Rock—a daughter, Amanda, who was born January 20, 1820, while Mr. and Mrs. McHenry were camping in a tent at what is now Markham and Commerce streets. He came to this state in 1818 from Nashville, Tenn., and built a large one-story log house, which burned later, on the site of the McHenry house. Descendants of Mr. McHenry live at Conway.



SHIRLEY BRYANT